

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the respondents agreed that the CVB fosters an atmosphere of teamwork. Eleven percent (11%) disagreed.

All of the staff who completed the survey agreed (100%) that the CVB provides the tools that they need to do their job.

Finally, when asked if the CVB provides them with on going education and career advancement opportunities, the majority of respondents (89%) agreed. Eleven percent (11%) strongly disagreed.

In addition to providing feedback on the survey questions, survey participants were given the opportunity to make additional comments regarding the strengths and weaknesses, of the organization as well as what is needed to market travel and tourism more effectively and what they would like to see the CVB accomplish in the future.

The following is a summary of the responses provided by CVB staff:

Strengths

Some of the LRCVB strengths identified by participants include:

- “Effective leadership from VP.”
- “Staff is dedicated and well trained.”
- “Cooperation – both among CVB staff and with the Chamber of Commerce.”
- “Good working relationship with the State and surrounding counties.”
- “Marketing activities (website, tradeshow schedule, FAM tours, etc.).”

Weaknesses

The most commonly identified weaknesses were:

- “Lack of communication among CVB staff.”
- “Need improved communication among Chamber and LRCVB staff.” (It is of note that no specific communication problems were identified by CVB staff in the survey and when asked during a conference call, the Chamber President indicated that he was unaware of any problems.)

- “Geographic separation of CVB staff between two different locations.”
- “Do not currently offer a widely accepted form of Return on Investment (ROI).”
- “Not enough space for storage and merchandise.”
- “There is confusion when it comes to the boundaries that are presented by the CVB's relationship to the Chamber of Commerce.”
- “Tourism Advisory Council has become an unnecessary committee.”
- “Location of Visitors Center – difficult for people to find.”

Marketing

When asked what was needed to be able to more effectively market travel and tourism for the Lynchburg region, staff responded:

- “A positive working relationship with the lodging industry.”
- “More involved tourism community who has a better understanding of the services provided by the CVB.”
- “Revamping of the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC).”
- “Expanded sales staff.”
- “Improved communication among staff.”
- “Relocation to a more accessible, high profile site.”

Biggest Obstacles

Staff identified the following as the biggest obstacles to succeeding in their jobs:

- “Geographical separation of CVB staff and communication issues due to separation.”
- “Limited meeting/conference space.”
- “Limited funding – restricts hiring of staff and program development.”
- “Lack of awareness and understanding in local government/community of tourism and its role as an economic development vehicle.”

CVB Future Accomplishments

Finally, when asked what they would like to see the CVB accomplish in the future, the respondents stated:

- “Increased communication.”
- “To develop benchmarking and ROI formulas that are accepted by local government.”
- “A positive working relationship with the lodging industry.”
- “More involved community who has a better understanding of the services provided by the CVB.”
- “An increased budget that would support the hiring of additional sales staff.”
- “A new, more highly visible location for the Visitors Center.”

Staff Survey - Key Findings

When reviewing the responses provided by the CVB staff, the project team noted that the following issues were most commonly identified by the respondents:

- Communication issues;
- The need for an improved relationship with the lodging industry;
- A need for increased community awareness of the CVB’s activities;
- Clarification of the Tourism Advisory Committee’s role; and
- The need for a more highly visible Visitors Information Center.

Interviews with Community Leaders

Individual interviews were conducted with community/civic leaders of the Lynchburg region. The list included elected officials, economic developers, and travel and tourism industry professionals.

Based on the project team’s research, the following CVB strengths were identified most commonly by the community leaders:

- The CVB staff is professional.

- The CVB provided leadership in coordinating tourism events on a project by project basis.

The following represents a summary of the weaknesses of the CVB identified by the community leaders:

- Several stakeholders indicated that they have had little or no involvement in the CVB's marketing and strategic planning process. As a result, some communities expressed concern that their interests were not included in the CVB's overall marketing and promotion strategy.

It is of note, that under the existing City contract, the CVB is not required to include regional stakeholders in the strategic planning process. Nor do any of the surrounding towns or counties contribute to the CVB's annual operating budget.

Community Leader Interviews - Key Findings

- Overall, the communities served by the CVB are pleased with the leadership and assistance provided by the staff of the CVB.
- A few stakeholders expressed concern that not all of the communities were receiving equal attention and resources from the CVB.

On-line Survey of Tourism Stakeholders

The LRCVB provided the project team with contact information for over 1,200 Chamber member businesses located in the Lynchburg region. The team, working with the VP of Tourism, culled the list down to one-hundred and forty-four (144) tourism related businesses who were invited to participate in an on-line survey designed to assess stakeholder satisfaction rates.

Working with Virginia Tech's electronic data collection site, *Survey.vt.edu*, the project team created a seventeen (17) question survey. The survey was reviewed by Chamber management, as well as the members of the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC).

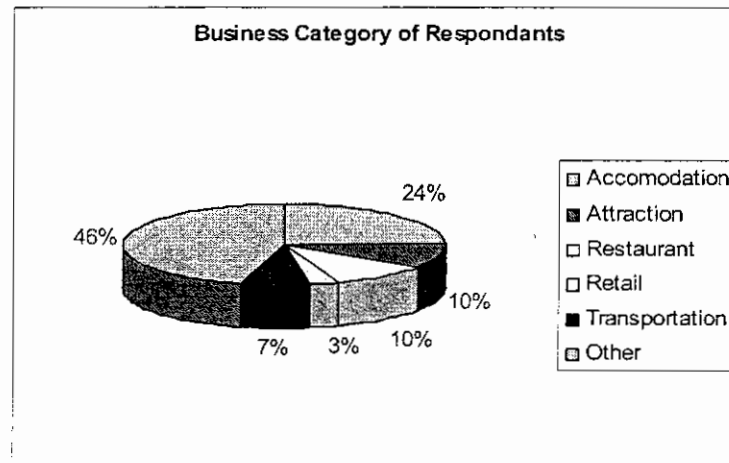
The project team sent e-mail invitations to each of the 144 identified tourism stakeholders asking them to complete the survey. The team followed up by sending two additional electronic invitations. Finally, an electronic invitation was sent by the VP of Tourism. When the survey was closed in early May, the project team had received twenty-nine (29) completed surveys. This yielded a twenty-one percent (21%) response rate. According to industry standards, a twenty percent (20%) response rate for electronic surveys is acceptable.

The margin of error for this survey is 1.45% with a 95% confidence level. Specifically, fourteen percent (14%) of the survey respondents indicated in question #2 that they were not aware of the LRCVB. Of those that indicated they were not aware of the LRCVB's activities, half or seven percent (7%) of the total respondents did not complete the survey.

A copy of the on-line survey questions are provided in Appendix E.

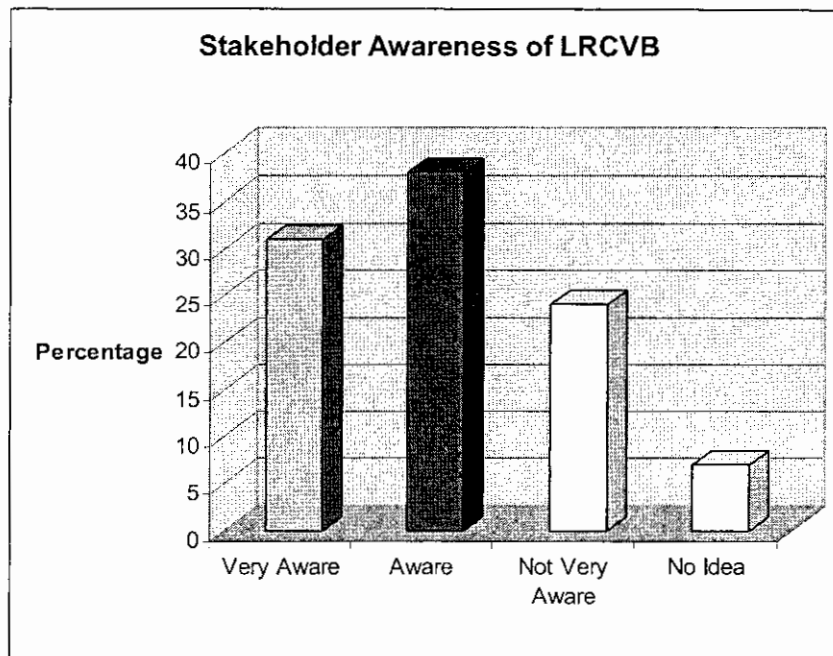
Survey Responses

The first survey question asked participants to describe which category best described their business. As illustrated below, almost one-fourth (24%) of those surveyed represented the lodging industry, ten percent (10%) were affiliated with an attraction, the arts or entertainment, another ten percent (10%) were restaurateurs, three percent worked in the retail industry, and seven percent (7%) were affiliated with transportation. Approximately one half (45%) of those surveyed described their business as "other."



Stakeholder Awareness of CVB

When asked, “Are you aware of the LRCVB?” the majority of respondents (86%) stated “Yes.” Fourteen percent (14%) of those surveyed responded “No.” The respondents were next asked to rate how aware they were of what the LRCVB does on a scale of 1-4, with 4 being “very aware.” As illustrated in the graph below, most respondents (69%) indicated that they were either aware or very aware of the CVB’s activities. Approximately one-fourth (24%) responded that they were not very aware, and another seven percent (7%) responded that they didn’t have any idea of what the LRCVB does.



Is the LRCVB Meeting Expectations

When asked if the LRCVB was meeting the respondents expectations, approximately two-thirds (66%) responded “Yes.” Twenty-eight percent (28%) responded “No” and another seven percent (7%) did not respond to the question.

The survey then asked for those respondents that indicated that the LRCVB was not meeting their expectation to provide an explanation. Their responses are summarized below:

- “Communication with the lodging industry is not as frequent as it has been in the past.”
- “CVB staff attends trade shows, but very few leads are provided to the hotels.”
- “There is limited contact between the CVB and area hotels.”
- “Limited coordination between CVB, city government and tourism stakeholders.”
- “I am unaware of what the CVB is doing to help the people it serves.”

LRCVB Strengths

Participants were next provided with an opportunity to discuss what they liked best about the LRCVB. A summary of their responses follows:

- “Strong leadership.”
- “Professional, dedicated people.”
- “Visitors Center.”
- “Communication – good referrals, information about upcoming events.”
- “Creative, effective marketing of the Lynchburg region.”

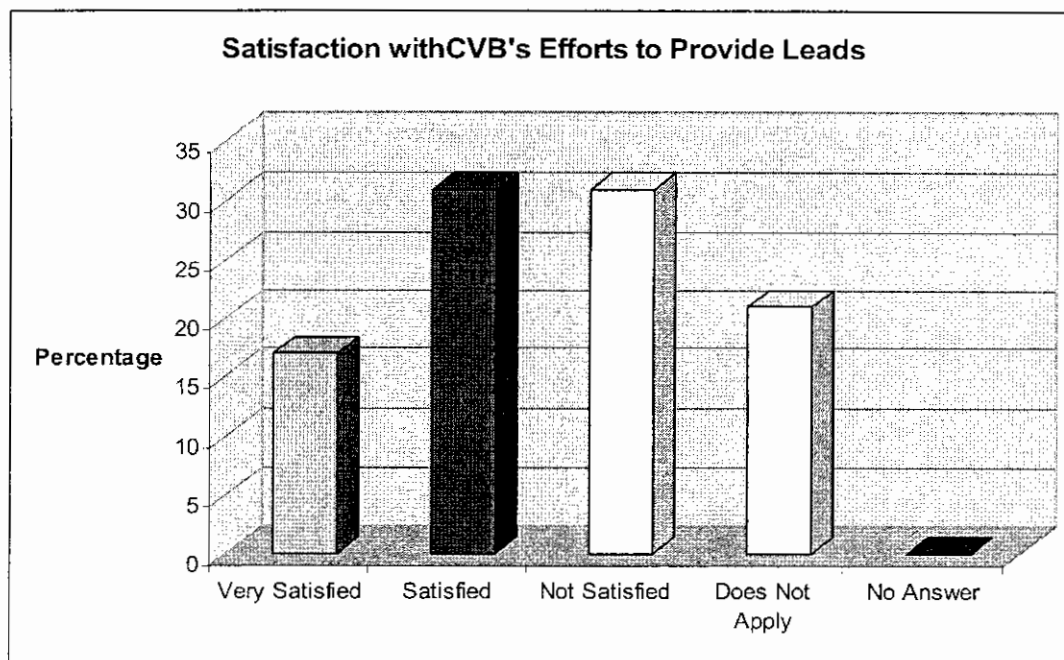
LRCVB Weaknesses

When asked what respondents like the least about the LRCVB, they provided the following comments:

- “Rarely talk to or visit lodging facilities.”
- “The CVB does not know my property or the changes going on here.”
- “...they do not measure results...”
- “I don’t hear enough about what they are doing.”
- “Affiliation with the Chamber is a conflict of interest and not the normal structure for a CVB.”
- “The CVB’s limited funding prohibits them from doing more promotion.”
- “Leads are often for very large groups that are only applicable for larger, full service hotel.”

Marketing to Conferences and Groups

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the Bureau’s efforts to provide opportunities to market their business for conferences or groups. The following graph shows that almost half (48%) of the respondents stated that they were very satisfied or satisfied. Thirty-one percent (31%) responded that they were not satisfied, and another twenty-one percent (21%) responded that they did not have an opinion or that the question did not apply to them. Some respondents commented that they did not see many leads from the LRCVB.

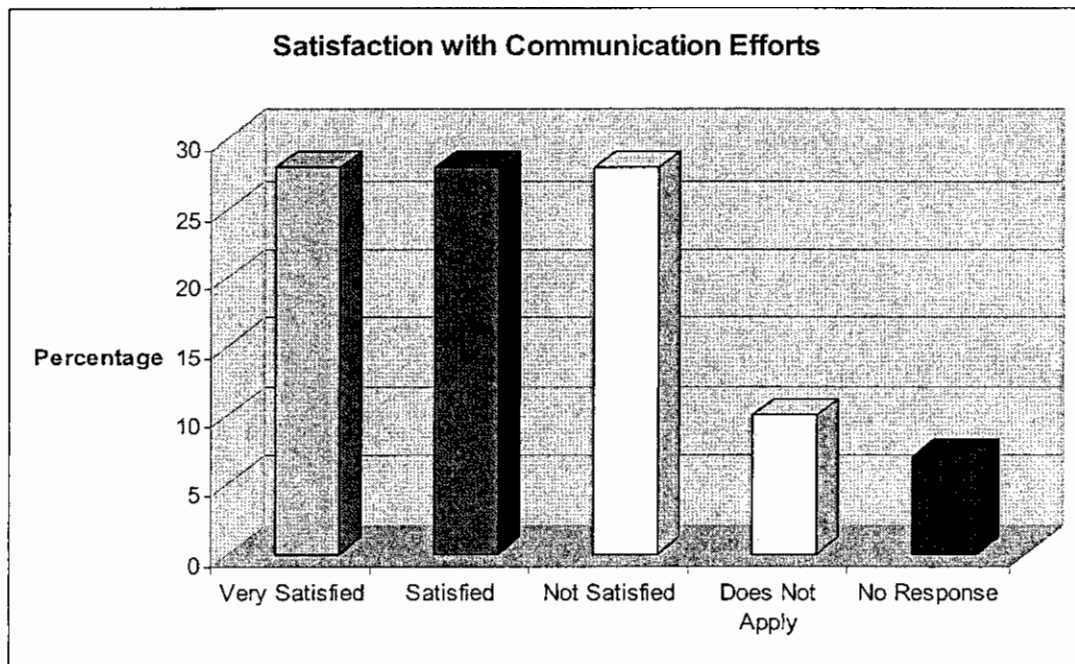


Bringing Business to the Region

When asked to rate their satisfaction with the Bureau's efforts to bring business to the Lynchburg region, over half (55%) of the respondents indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied. Twenty-eight percent (28%) responded that they were not satisfied, ten percent (10%) did not have an opinion, and seven percent (7%) did not respond to the question.

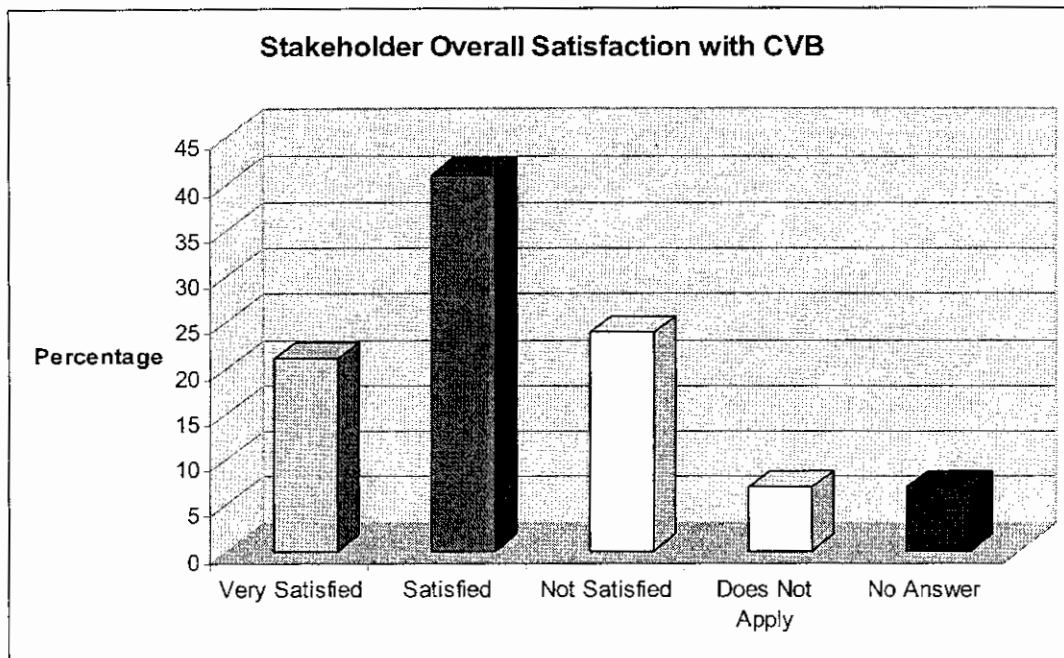
Communication Efforts

Respondents were asked to rank the Bureau's efforts to keep them informed of Bureau activities and visitor industry developments. As the graph below shows, over half (56%) of the respondents indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the Bureau's efforts to keep them informed. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of the respondents were not satisfied; ten percent (10%) did not have an opinion or felt that the question did not apply to them. Seven percent (7%) of the respondents did not provide an answer for this question.



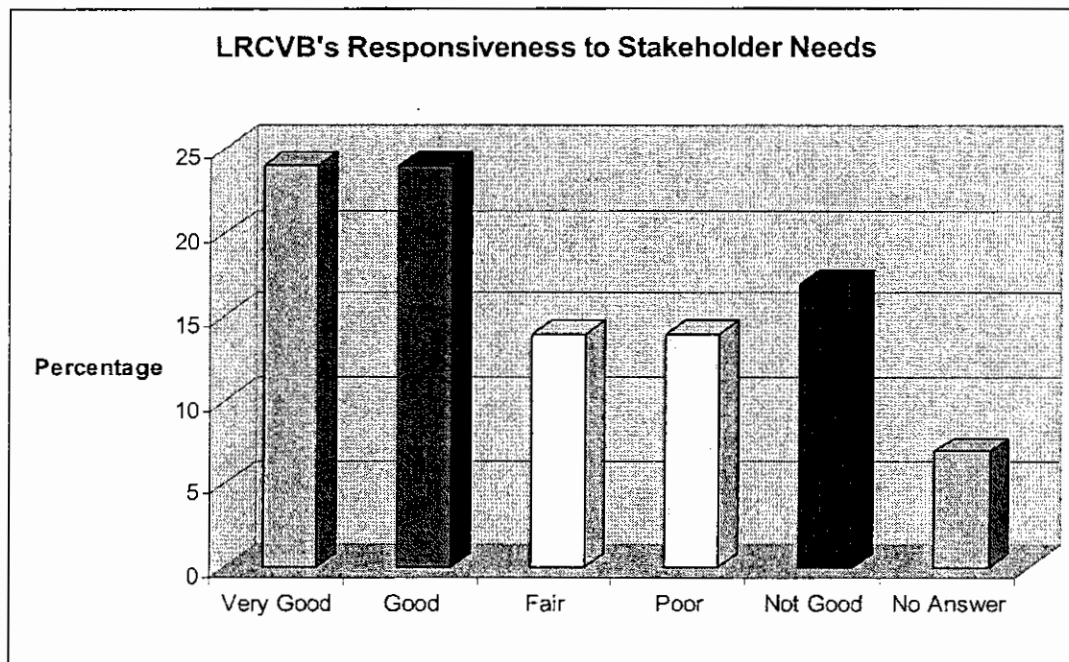
Overall Satisfaction

When asked about their overall satisfaction with the CVB, the majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied. Specifically, as illustrated in the graph below, about one-fifth (21%) of the respondents indicated that they were very satisfied, forty-one percent (41%) responded that they were satisfied, approximately one-fourth (24%) were not satisfied, and other seven percent (7%) expressed that they did not have an opinion. An additional seven percent (7%) did not provide a response to the question.



LRCVB's Responsiveness

Survey participants were next asked to rate the responsiveness of the LRCVB to meeting the tourism-related needs of their business on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being "very good." The graph below illustrated that approximately one-half (48 %) of those surveyed thought the LRCVB was very responsive or responsive, fourteen percent (14%) felt the LRCVB was fairly responsive, another fourteen percent (14%) did not feel that the LRCVB was responsive, and seventeen percent (17%) ranked the LRCVB's responsiveness as "not good."



When asked “What could the LRCVB do to improve services in relation to your business?” A summary of their responses is provided below:

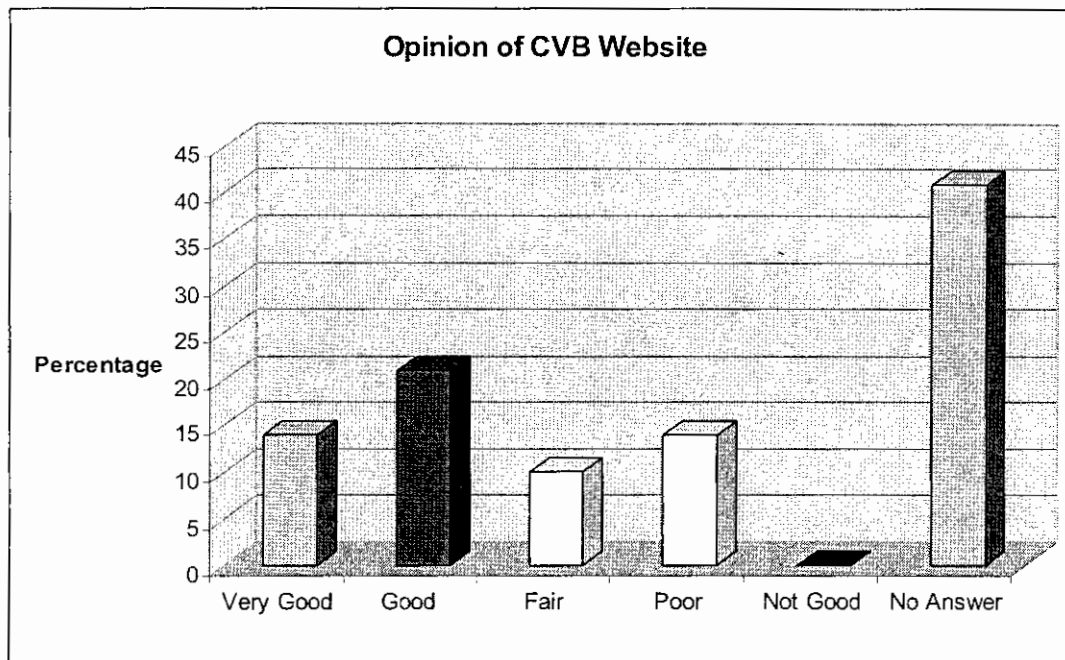
- Work more regionally.
- Spend more time with clients.
- Visit clients to get a better understanding of their needs.

Website

Over half of the respondents (59%) reported that they had visited the LRCVB website. A little over one-fourth (28%) reported that they had not seen the website, and an additional fourteen percent (14%) did not respond to the question.

Those respondents who had visited the website were asked what they thought of the new Lynchburg CVB website, <http://www.discoverlynchburg.org/index.htm>. As illustrated in the graph below, of those who responded to the question, thirty-five (35%) thought the website was good, ten percent (10%) thought it was fair and fourteen (14%) thought the

website was poor. Forty-one percent (41%) of those surveyed did not respond to the question.



When asked, “What would you like to see included on the LRCVB website?” participants responded that they wanted to see the following:

- A more complete calendar of events.
- More multi-media.
- An easy to navigate website where information is no more than two clicks away.
- A professional website

Committee to Assist LRCVB

Question 16 asked respondents if they would be interested in working on a committee to assist the LRCVB’s promotional efforts. Over half (52%) of those surveyed responded that they would be interested in participating. Thirty-eight percent (38%) responded “No.” Ten percent (10%) of those surveyed did not respond to the question.

Focus Group Participation

And finally, when asked if they would be interested in participating in a focus group meeting to discuss issues, ideas and concerns regarding the LRCVB, over half (62%) responded “Yes” and twenty-eight percent (28%) responded no. Ten percent (10%) of the respondents did not provide an answer.

Focus Group

On July 21, 2005, a focus group meeting of Lynchburg area hoteliers, restaurateurs, and tourism-related businesses was facilitated by Howard Feiertag, a well-known hospitality industry veteran and member of the Hospitality and Tourism Management department at Virginia Tech. The purpose of the meeting was to obtain a greater understanding of the relationship and possible issues between the Lynchburg Bureau and the area stakeholders they serve.

Focus group participants were randomly selected from a list of tourism-related Chamber member businesses.

The participants were asked to provide feedback to the following questions:

1. What did they identify as the strengths of the LRCVB?
2. What was their primary concerns regarding the operation of the Bureau?
3. What did they view as the pros and cons of a CVB being an arm of the Chamber of Commerce?

Strengths of the CVB

The focus group participants identified the following as strengths of the Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce and the CVB:

- CVB staff is good to work with; cooperative.
- CVB sales staff provides good leads to hotels.

- Communication – monthly mailings to business membership, list of new members and address updates, Commerce report.
- Chamber provides its members with good networking opportunities (i.e., Friday After Hours Program, and the Chamber Breakfast)
- The Chamber provides good professional development opportunities (i.e., Women’s Executive Series and the Customer Service Seminar).

Concerns Regarding CVB

When asked their primary concerns regarding the operation of the CVB, the two issues that ranked the highest were:

- “Concern of getting enough businesses to Lynchburg.”
- “That they continue to get out to community businesses.”

Once the group had identified their two primary concerns, participants were asked to discuss why they felt these were important issues and to brainstorm possible solutions.

Identified Issue: “Concern of getting enough businesses to Lynchburg.”

When asked why this was an important issue, participants responded that:

- Bringing in more businesses to the area will result in increased revenue for the region.
- The more people you have, the greater the possibility of increased Chamber membership.
- As more businesses are brought to the region, there will be an increased awareness of the area.
- As you increase the number of businesses that are brought to the region, you will also increase the number of jobs.

When asked for solutions to increase the number of businesses coming to the area, participants responded:

- Increase the number of presentations being made promoting the Lynchburg area.
- Work more closely with the Virginia Tourism Corporation; pool resources.

- The City should increase the agency's budget. If the CVB is promoting the City and bringing people to the City, then the City should increase the CVB's budget.
- The CVB needs to add an additional sales staff member.
- Increase the number of FAM tours.
- It would be helpful for Chamber members to get a report of the CVB's activities.

Identified Issue: "That they continue to get out to community businesses."

When asked for solutions to increase the number of businesses coming to the area, participants responded:

- The CVB needs to go into the community twice a year and solicit member input.
- Communication is good. We would like to meet face to face in a town meeting forum.

Governance of CVB

The participants were asked to identify what they felt the pros and cons associated with a CVB being housed in a Chamber of Commerce. The participants identified the following as benefits:

- "Power in numbers."
- "Teamwork."
- "The Chamber is more effective when paired with the CVB."

They cited the fact that businesses would have to pay dues to two (2) membership organizations as the biggest drawback to having a separate chamber and CVB.

Focus Group - Key Findings

- The focus group participants did not seem to be fully aware of what the CVB roles, responsibilities and accomplishments were.
- The focus group participants did not appear to understand how the CVB was funded and how the occupancy tax revenues were spent.

- The LRCVB does not currently document feedback from clients and tourism stakeholders.

Interviews with Peer CVBs

In addition to interviewing tourism representatives and economic developers from neighboring counties (Amherst, Bedford, Nelson and Campbell), the project team spoke with management and staff from peer Bureaus and tourism departments including the Roanoke CVB, Harrisonburg-Rockingham County, Wytheville Convention and Visitors Bureau, Abingdon Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Staunton CVB, and the Shenandoah Valley Tourism office.

The project team recognizes that it is very difficult to compare destination marketing organizations. The organizations included in this peer group differ in organization structure, number of FTEs, and have budgets that range from \$350K to \$1.2M. The selection criteria used for inclusion in the interview portion of the study was based on the organization's geographic location within the Commonwealth, the nature of the attractions located in the region, and/or demographics.

The project team asked each of the individuals interviewed to discuss what they saw as the benefits and challenges of different types of CVB organization structures. When asked their opinions regarding what the benefits of a CVB being housed in a Chamber of Commerce, those interviewed responded:

Benefits

- "The CVB benefits from the professionalism of the Chamber."
- "A CVB that is housed within a Chamber has a buffer. If the CVB gets "attacked," it has the protection of the Chamber."
- "The CVB benefits from being part of an organization with an established communication mechanism (Chamber mailing, e-mails, contacts with existing businesses)."

- “Cost savings on shared equipment (copier, fax, etc.).”
- “Synergy.”

The project team then asked interviewees what they felt were the biggest challenges for CVBs that are a division of the Chamber. Their responses were as follows:

Challenges

- “Chambers are internally driven and designed to represent existing business members where as CVBs are externally driven looking to attract business to the area.”
- “Bureaus housed in Chambers sometimes experience an “identity crisis”; they are viewed as the Chamber’s tourism program.”
- “Some Chambers view Bureaus as a revenue stream.”
- “A percentage of the CVB budget goes towards paying a portion of Chamber salaries (staff time, custodial fee and supplies).”
- “Typically the Director of a CVB housed in a Chamber reports to the President of the Chamber. As a result, the CVB Director doesn’t have the ultimate authority to hire and fire staff, negotiate their own operating budgets or have final program approval.”
- “CVBs housed in Chambers have to report to more than one governing structure.”

Performance Measurement and Benchmarking Study

This final section of the performance audit was prepared by Virginia Tech graduate students as part of a *Local Government* course taught by OED faculty member, Chad Miller. A Performance Measurement and Benchmarking study was conducted to compare the activity and performance of the Lynchburg CVB with three peer organizations.

A complete copy of the report has been included in Appendix F.